Religion—Orthodox and Otherwise

I.

THE CRISIS OF THE CHURCHES By Leighton Parks. Charles Scribner's Sons.

AFTER all, the most significant thing about the various widely spread movements toward some sort of unification of the Christian churches is the persistent unity of aspiration. There is, at least, a well nigh unanimous feeling that, somehow or other, they *ought* to be able to get together; it is partly an uneasy suspicion that there must be something wrong about a situation which shows many scores of divergent sects, each one of which claims insistently that it is a Christian church, founded upon a belief in Christ and His teachings. Until recently, almost up to our own day, it sufficed each of these variant churches to denounce the others as heretical, or to deny them any right to call themselves Christian at all. That mental attitude is far from extinct to-day, but it no longer rules. The average Christian does not generally regard the member of a rival sect as necessarily damned. Even the narrower churches are not now so sure of their monopoly of salvation. The steady trend is rather toward broader tolerance and, as a necessary consequence, a movement toward real unity.

That the many tentative attempts show thus far no very epochmaking results is not surprising. In the nature of things if any unity is possible it is apt to be a plant of slow growth and is not likely to be conjured into instant existence by any magic formula. It is more likely to be a product of a slow spread of education. In the meantime it is useful to learn how far each of the more important larger bodies is willing to go and what the more enlightened leaders of thought within these particular folds hope for. It is here that Dr. Parks's contribution is of prime importance. It carries the weight of his personality, and while, of course, it is not in any way an "official" pronouncement it may be accepted as stating the position of a very large and influential section of the more thoughtful and progressive Christian thinkers in one of the greatest of the old churches.

Possibly the limitations it suggests are more important than its forward looking aspirations, since it is necessary for each unit to state the irreducible minimum of its platform before it is possible to hunt out a really universal common factor as a basis for agreement. Dr. Parks leaves us no doubt as to his position. He claims that for the Greek, Roman and the various Protestant churches (with one small exception) the "fundamental doctrine of the Christian religion is the Trinity of the One God." To this must also be added some scheme of "redemption." Questions of discipline, ritual, forms of worship, the priesthood, and even the various peculiar superstructures that particular creeds consider vital he thinks may be left, so to speak, at one side, for each unit to handle for itself—leaving as a practical basis for agreement only the Trinity, the divinity of Christ, and some doctrine of redemption for sinful humanity.

Dr. Parks will have none of the idea that Christian ethics may be preserved without Christ, or in "the vain hope that the ethics of the Gospel will survive when the Master who gave the new law of life with its sanctifying power is thought of as a myth." Furthermore, he is not willing to regard the church as solely a "social" instrumentality concerned with the betterment of mankind alone; its chief business, he holds, is still with God, and he would preserve much of the distinction between sacred and secular. The old saying, he argues, *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus*," is true, though the prevalent interpretation which would substitute some particular church makes it false."

Starting from these premises he yet foresees a broad fellowship among the Christian churches as not merely possible but necessary if the modern church is to remain vitally alive. He admits that the church has been too much concerned with the problem of the salvation of each individual soul and not enough with society as a large organism. It is a thoughtful, well reasoned argument, truly constructive in aim and practical in many of its suggestions, though to the outside observer it appears to minimize or wholly omit some important factors that seem needed to the making of any broadly progressive new church.

II.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT. By John Elliotson Symes. E. P. Dutton & Co.

MR. SYMES, formerly principal of University College, Nottingham, has provided a very useful, scholarly book in this study, valuable partly because it is almost encyclopædic in its treatment of the subject and brings the record of research down to date. Much of it is naturally controversial but Mr. Symes is especially careful to note where his conclusions do not agree with the majority opinion among Biblical scholars, as, for instance, in his treatment of the Apocalypse. His general tendency is in favor of rather early dates for the composition of most of the twenty-seven books, though he can scarcely be called radical or reactionary in that direction.

His treatment is, so far as he thinks it possible, chronological, which, of course, differs greatly from the order as they stand in the accepted book. After a brief introduction of pre-Testament tradition and a short historical outline, he takes up in detail the Pauline epistles, which take up by far the greater part of the study. He passes then to the general epistles, and finally to the Gospels and the Johannine books. He also provides a useful supplementary chapter on the non-canonical writings, especially the "Shepard of Hermas" and Barnabas.

III.

THE CARPENTER AND HIS KINGDOM. By Alexander Irvine. Charles Scribner's Sons.

THIS illuminating and deeply reverent book is one that will be of special interest to all persons interested in the cause of social and economic justice. It is a frank interpretation of the fundamentals of Christianity, one which aims so to present the teachings of its founder as to make them the controlling principle in the life of the individual. While it uncovers cant and hypocrisy wherever these are intrenched, it affords no encouragement for the agitator or the revolutionary.

As the title implies, "The Carpenter and His Kingdom" is primarily for the world's workers. It is written from the point of view of a many sided man whose career as lecturer and writer, organizer, preacher, economist and industrial worker has given him unusual opportunity for the study of social and economic conditions. It interprets with vigor and insight the genius of the Nazarene and His kingdom and stands out refreshingly against the mass of books by so-called Christian historians on decaying theological issues. It touches briefly but patiently upon matters which even in this late day have not yet been relegated to the limbo of extinct controversies.

The book is written with pungent and incisive humor. It is often ironical in treatment, a mood evoked no doubt by the contemplation of things as they are. Throughout its pages it is filled with the spirit of democracy. "Kings," writes the author, "are not always points of departure to be proud of. They are a luxury people cannot always afford. Carpenters are a necessity." Elsewhere he writes, "Revolutions are respectable only in success."

Dr. Irvine conceives of Jesus as a normal, healthy minded man with a "genius for geniality." He writes: "The record tells of His weeping, but there is no word intended to convey the idea that He ever laughed. Yet we know He laughed. All normally minded people laugh. The foolishness of the wise and the wisdom of the foolish were manifested often in His immediate circle, and the mental gymnastics of the Pharisees and the blundering impulsiveness of Peter and others must often have spread out the thin smile into a joyous laugh."

Of "Jesus and Business" there is this: "Millions of little children are slaves of the wheel of labor, hundreds of thousands of mothers give birth to children under conditions that are brutal. This does not mean that the religion of Jesus has failed. It means that it has not been tried. Millions reject things called by His name. They accept Him."

In speaking of "Jesus and Usury," the writer quotes Ruskin on usury and adds: "Ruskin and St. Augustine may be revolutionary in matters of business, but they are both correctly interpreting the Kingdom of God as taught by Jesus."

For all its frankness of outlook the book is not essentially pessimistic. It holds out a wide hope for the future. "In all sections of Christendom," concludes the author, "there are men and women of light and leading, prophets, priests and thinkers, who are rethinking Jesus. They are digging out of the rubbish of the ages the fundamental things that Jesus taught. On the shoulders of these torch bearers there rests as great a responsibility as that which rested on the shoulders of a circle of intimate friends at Capernaum."

IV.

THE MYSTERY OF MORMONISM. By Stuart Martin. E. P. Dutton & Co.

BY way of paying a left handed compliment to the centenary of the beginnings of the Mormon faith, Stuart Martin wrote a history of Mormonism in England in 1920, which has just been published here by the Duttons. Based on exhaustive study, including at least one visit to Utah, the narrative is a very complete record of the cult that sprang from Joseph Smith's "vision" in the woods of Manchester, N. Y., in 1820, a record that is based on the evidence of both sides of Mormonism, and a desire to be perfectly fair, but which looks at everything from the anti-Mormon viewpoint, small shrift being given to Mormon claims or Mormonism's official replies to charges brought against it.

The reader can follow here, almost literally step by step, the story of Joseph Smith's revelations in that little wood in New York, the founding of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints—to give it the official title—and the westward progress of Smith and his followers until, after his tragic death in Carthage, Ill., in 1844, they eventually reached the Salt Lake Valley that was to become the central seat of Mormonism's influence and power. The story of the "gold plates," on which the revelations were inscribed is told in detail, and of the second set of plates, this time of brass, in 1843, which no one but Joseph Smith could decipher, and he declared them to contain a history of the descendants of Ham. This westward march of the Mormons is a moving tragedy. Everywhere they settled until they reached the Salt Lake Valley, and even after that, they had to fight for their existence against the bitter hatred of their neighbors, and in every case had to give in to that active enmity.

In this part of his narrative Mr. Martin does not make it clear enough how strongly the economic factors entered into this question of persecution. The Mormon leaders of that day were tremendously forceful men, and they realized they had to conquer the soil, as well as the souls of men and women, if they and their cult were to live. If they had been men of less violent belief in their right to worship as they pleased it would appear that they might have been as unmolested as a body of Shakers in any community to-day. But they fought attack with counter-attack, set up their own governments and defied that of State and nation, and were invariably defeated in the beginning and until they reached Utah. Even here they defied the Government, are believed by this writer of their history to have been responsible for the "Mountain Meadows Massacre" and of covertly defying the laws of the United States by practicing polygamy to-day. In one thing he does the Mormons justice. That is the manner in which they have turned much of the State of Utah from waste desert into a veritable garden.

He gives the text of the revelation regarding plural marriages, the text of many of the ceremonies of the church and a list of organizations that have seceded from the parent church. As to the future of Mormonism he says in his introduction to the volume:

"Since Mormonism was born in that small wood its story has been mostly tragic, with here and there a gleam of heroism lighting up the dull, terrible scenes of pitiful, wasted effort and misguided action. The scars of its sufferings are plainly marked upon Mormonism, and, if the creed is to live, its final adjustment to the demands of the civilization of the twentieth century has yet to be made. The author has tried to indicate what the adjustment demands of Mormonism, and how the finer men and women of the church shrink from the coming crisis. When the adjustment takes place—as it inevitably will, though most likely by slow degrees—the Mormonism of Joseph Smith and Brigham Young will be strangled in Utah, and the last vestige of its abominations will disappear."

Uncle Tom Years Later

Continued from Preceding Page.

No reader of current fiction needs any introduction to Octavus Roy Cohen, E. K. Means, or Hugh Wiley. Perhaps some of Mr. Cohen's actors show a trace of burnt cork, but for the most part the "coons" of this school of writers have the inherent truth that often lies behind travesty. Mr. Wiley's handling, for example, of the negro soldier (as in "The Boom-a-Loom-Boom") is masterly. Mr. Means enters more subtly into an understanding of the peculiar negro psychology, especially in their persisting separateness from the white folks among whom they live. All of these writers know their negro intimately, and do not misrepresent him—but none of them has made any large attempt to portray him fully.

Judge Dickson has approached such a portrayal, and Marquis in "Danny's Own Story" and in the short sketch "Carter" has plumbed the depths—but only in passing. One cannot resist the temptation to quote one "high spot" from "Danny" showing the yellow "bishop" who thinks the doctor's "dope" may turn him white.

"Gawd knows de nights er my youth I'se laid awake twell de dawn come red in de Eas' a cryin' out ter Him only fo' ter be white! Don' min' dem black niggars dar—dey ain't wuth nothin' nor fitten fo' no fate but what dey got—but *me!* What's done kep' me from gwine ter de top but dat one thing: I wasn't *white!*"

There is a summary, in one outburst, of the whole tragedy of the mulatto. Its implications extend beyond the vision of any man to-day.

It has been left for the present, and coming, generation of writers to develop the possibilities of this vast field. Mr. Stribling and, in a larger view, Mr. Shands have shown the way, as has been pointed out in the fuller reviews of their books in THE HERALD. It is startling to look back seventy years, and to find along with "Uncle Tom" and "Cudjo" one of the best statements of the whole case in the impassioned words of a negro poetess, Mrs. Frances E. Harper, whose first verses were printed in 1854. In a poem addressed to the white women of America she cried out:

Weep not, oh my well sheltered sisters,
Weep not for the negro alone,
But weep for your sons who must gather
The crops which their fathers have sown.

Mr. Stribling has stated the thing in brutal prose, in a recent sketch (printed in the *Evening Post*), when he remarks: "I knew in my heart that in the South the begetting of a mixed child is looked upon as venial, but openly to acknowledge such a child, to care for it, look after it, educate it and treat it as a son would place the offender beyond the pale." There is the key to the whole vast tragedy, as it lives and breathes not merely in the South but in every large city, including our own—one form or another of miscegenation. Any reader who prefers to make light of it would do well to read Mr. Shands's story, "White and Black," and think out its implications.

The Negro in Song

THE BOOK OF AMERICAN NEGRO POETRY. Edited by James Weldon Johnson. Harcourt, Brace & Co.

MR. JOHNSON is justified in claiming that there is more excuse for this anthology than for most such collections, as poetry by negroes is little known to the general public. Much of it is worth knowing, though one can hardly say that there is anything in this volume above a respectable level of attainment. It is, however, nearly all of it genuine in its emotion, which is more than can be said of most current verse. It is usually fairly musical: the negro's innate sense of rhythm and his cultivated love of melody stand him in good stead when it comes to lyric expression. One may not unreasonably look forward, some day, to the emergence of a really great negro poet. Thus far Dunbar still stands as the highest achievement of the race in America.

Most of the names in this collection will be unfamiliar to the average reader—except such as Du Bois, Braithwaite, Brawley and Mr. Johnson himself. And as to these, most of them appear to greater advantage in their prose writing.

There is a slight touch of "the divine fire" in the work of Claude McKay, a Jamaican, and at present an editor of the *Liberator*. He is also not afraid to tread upon rather dangerous ground, as in "The Barrier."

I must not see upon your face
Love's softly glowing spark;
For there's the barrier of race,
You're fair and I am dark.

Of more interest than the poems themselves is Mr. Johnson's introduction, giving a brief outline of the earlier writings of negroes in America, from Revolutionary times to the present. He also claims as a definite contribution of value to the composite which we often hear called "Americanism" the creation or introduction of the cakewalk, ragtime, the "Uncle Remus" folklore and the negro "spirituals" as folksong. The broad effect upon dancing of these native African rhythms is, of course, visible to the naked eye everywhere to-day, though opinions may still vary as to its lasting value. With music he is on safer ground—there is an indubitably important contribution to American music in the African elements; one that, as he predicts, may some day turn out to be a basis of really great composition.

The volume also has a useful appendix containing brief biographies of the poets represented.